

**Report on the
2017 Archaeological Testing
in the West Closet at the
Reverend James Keith Parsonage
in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts**

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A preliminary archaeological survey was conducted on the south lawn of the Reverend James Keith Parsonage on September 13, 2016. The primary goal of the survey was to assess the degree of disturbance present in the south lawn area and the archaeological potential of the property. A total of six 50-cm-square shovel test pits were excavated in a single transect running west to east along the midline of the south yard. As a result of the testing, it was found that the site holds great potential to provide further information about the seventeenth century occupation of the property. Intact features that appear to date at least to the pre-Pratt occupation of 1837 were identified in Test pits 1 and 3. The feature in Test pit 1 is tentatively identified as either the foundation of an outbuilding, or, thanks to research by Greg Lott of the Old Bridgewater Historical Society, may be evidence of a well that reportedly was once located near the house. Tantalizing evidence of a Native occupation and evidence of the 17th century occupation were represented by a scattering of artifacts that surely could be elaborated upon through additional excavation.

PARP was invited back in January of 2017 to investigate the potential of conducting archaeological testing beneath the ground floor of the house and to further examine the degree to which past renovations had removed 17th century architectural elements from the house. Visual inspections were carried out behind the built-in shelves and the wall heating units on the west and south walls of the west room. One test pit was excavated under the floor east room closet located beneath of the front staircase (**Figure 1**).

Built-In Investigation

The removal of the wall unit in the west room, a feature that appears to have been installed during 1970 renovation, allowed us to look at the framing timbers behind the kitchen and west room hearths(**Figure 2**). The majority of the element found appeared to date to the 1970s renovations. The only original pieces found were the second story north plate, the northeast corner post of the original house and the summer beam of the west room. Yellow paint was observed on the north plate and the summer beam, indicating that, prior to the 1970s, the northwest corner of the room was approximately 6" larger (to the east). No evidence of whitewashing or plastering on the summer beam or the north plate was found, meaning that the original room was not whitewashed or plastered and may have had paneling on the interior, or was merely exposed wood. The lintle beam over the hearth was also visible in the built-in, but it appears to be a reused old timber reused as a lintle in the 1970s (**Figure 3**).

Wall Heater Investigation

The two wall heaters in the west room were carefully removed and the exterior sheathing boards were exposed, but, unfortunately, it appears many of the sheathing boards, at least those behind the heaters, were replaced in the 1970s and no traces of the original interior walls were found.

East Closet Test Pit

Traces of 19th century wall plaster lathe shadows are visible within the east closet. The west wall of the closet, which consisted of three boards that appear to have been nailed in place since the 19th century, were carefully removed and it was determined that an area of the floor approximately 60 cm square, could be removed to see what evidence remained of the original ground surface below the building (**Figure 4**). This area would have been located just south of the original hearth in the original house. One interesting finding was a piece of original 17th century floor joist that was reused in the 19th century as part of the staircase (**Figure 5**). This joist bears three vertical lines meant to identify its place in the construction of the building.

Two layers of floorboards were encountered and removed and numerous floor joists and sistered joists, all apparently dating to the 1830s Pratt renovation period, were found. The ground surface below the floor consisted of loose soil with many pieces of brick and mortar. This loose fill (identified as Fill Layer 2) was removed to a depth of 40 cmbs, below which a second fill layer (Fill Layer 1) was found (**Figure 6**). This layer contained many cobbles and much gravel and fewer artifacts. Fill Layers 1 and 2 dated to the 19th century and may represent excavat from the digging of the cellar (which was believed to date from the 17th century but which may date to the 1837 Pratt renovation) and the possible rising of the entire house approximately 19” above the original ground surface.

Below Fill Layer 1, the original ground surface dating from the 17th century was found (**Figure 7**). The surface of this layer had lumps of clay, which are believed to represent clay mortar used in the 17th century chimney (probably the 1678 chimney versus the 1660s chimney), and 17th century brick fragments. Probably the most significant finding from this excavation was the discovery of one of the original floor joists, probably from the 1660s house, still remaining within a joist trench. The use of joists and sills that were buried in the ground to a point where they were almost level with the ground surface, appears characteristic of many early period buildings that PARP has found in Plymouth Colony and that others have found in Maine at the site of Popham's 1607 Colony. The discovery of this joist, which measures 5 x 5 cm (2 x 2”) within a trench measuring 15 cm (6”) wide indicates that th original joist was probably close to 6” in diameter, but that when th house was raised, the joist had rotted to a degree that it was just left in place when the building was raised and new joists were added. The identification of a buried joist opens the possibility that the original 1660s house was earthfast and that the corner posts were originally buried in the ground. It is recommended that test pits be excavated outside the locations of the original corner posts to see if any evidence of postholes or the rotted lower sections of the posts can be found.

Artifacts

A total of 184 artifacts were recovered from the test pit in the east closet (**Table 1**). Approximately 1” of soil was present on top of the floorboards beneath the stairs, within which, three hand-

Table 1. Artifacts recovered in 2016

Artifact	Top of Boards	0-10 cm	10-20 cm	20-40 cm	40-60 cm
Brick		4	2	4	2
Mortar		7	1		1
Window Glass		6			
Hand-Wrought Nails	3	3	5	1	

Machine-Cut Nails		2			
Redware	1				
Creamware		6	3		
Pearlware		1	1		
Tobacco Pipe Bowl				1	
6/64" Pipe Stem		1			
5/64" Tobacco Pipe Stem			1		
Hand Blown Wine Bottle		1	2		
Hurricane Lamp Glass		3			
Mold Blown Glass			1		
Mirror Glass					
Bone		30	12	1	9
Shell		4	2		1
Charcoal		1	2	2	
Seeds/ Nuts		4	1		
Wood		22			1
Coal			1		
Slag		2			
Glass Flake?		1			
Quartz Core				1	
Quartz Debitage		3	3	6	10
Rhyolite Flake Fragment				1	
Totals	4	100	37	17	24

wrought flooring nails and a piece of a redware pan were found. The artifact assemblage from 0-20 cm appeared to date from the 19th century, from the Pratt renovation period (ca. 1837) while the remainder of the soil to 60 cmbs is believed to date from the 1660s to 1670s.

Prehistoric material was abundant, taking the form of 22 pieces of quartz debitage (flakes, flake fragments, shatter, and a core) and one rhyolite flake. Finding these artifacts offered support to the findings from the test pits excavated in the south yard where a moderate amount of Native material hints at some degree of occupation in the prehistoric period. One clear glass “flake” was recovered from the 0-10 cm level. Whether this is a real “flake”, intentionally created, or is more probably just a fortuitous flake created by a clear vessel being accidentally broken, is not known, but the later is suspected.

Seventeenth century material took the form of brick fragments, hand-wrought nails, and at least one pipe stem. Nineteenth century material consisted of creamware and pearlware vessel fragments,

machine-cut nails, window glass, fragments of wine bottle, a 2-hole brass button, a tobacco pipe stem, and a molded glass bottle bearing a floral design. Two complete wooden shingles were found on the surface of the unit. Latham reported that Pratt removed the shingles on the house and replaced them with clapboards. The recovered shingles appear to be 19th century in style and are consistent with the Pratt period.

The faunal remains, which took the form of bones from domestic animals that were consumed by the inhabitants (cattle, sheep, swine, and chickens), are believed to date to the 19th century based on their stratigraphic position. These may have been the remains of meals eaten by the men working on the house ca. 1837, they may be bones dragged under the house for consumption by the rats (whose bones were also found) or they may have arrived under the floor as a result of a combination of processes. The seed and nut fragments are believed to have been brought under the house by rodents.

Aside from the rat bones found, bones of one juvenile cat and two bones from a fish (possibly caught in the adjacent river?) were also found. The cat remains were found scattered about and may represent either a cat purposefully buried inside of the front door in an act of sympathetic magic to keep rats out, or may simply be a cat that crawled under the house and died.

The complete catalog of artifacts from this unit is presented in the appendix at the end of this report and photographs of representative artifacts are presented in **Figures 8 to 13**.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The very limited amount of testing we conducted beneath the house in January 2017, has brought to light at least two interesting questions regarding the early architecture of the building. The first is the presence of a floor joist found deeply buried below later fill layers and the second is those fill layers themselves. The joist is not buried as a result of the fill layers, but appears to have been buried in a trench when the building was originally constructed. This is a 17th century technique that may indicate that the entire building was constructed using a technique called earthfast or post-in-ground construction. When buildings are built like this, as they are believed to have been in the earliest Plymouth Colony houses, the corner posts, sills, and joists of hastily constructed/ relatively temporary buildings, are buried in the ground. It is an old English technique and appears to have allowed a stable, sturdy building to be constructed in a relatively short amount of time, possibly eliminating the need for additional wind braces on the walls. The down side is that these buildings were not meant to be permanent and those portions buried beneath the soil, especially in wet areas like the Keith property, tend to rot. The original house may have been built that way, but it appears that by the 1800s, the house was in such disrepair that extensive renovations were necessary, which appears to have included the excavation of the cellar beneath the eastern hall and the raising of the house approximately a foot and a half above its original ground level. These are questions that require further investigation through additional testing beneath the house floors, whenever this is possible, and through the excavation of test units outside the house so that the fill layers can be better understood and the corners of the house can be tested for the presence of postholes that would be expected if the house was post-in-ground.

Figures

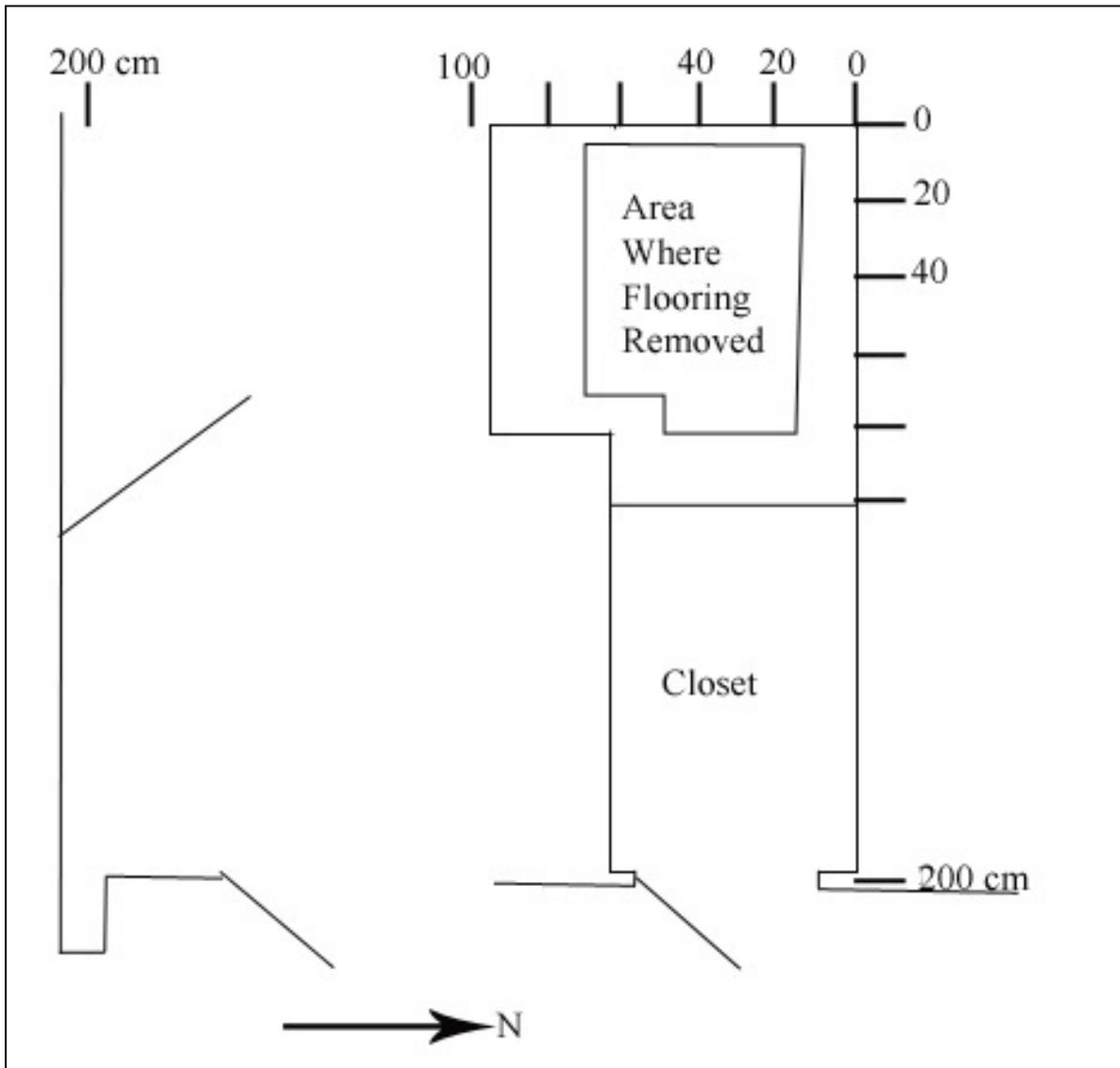


Figure 1. Location of excavation area in the east room closet

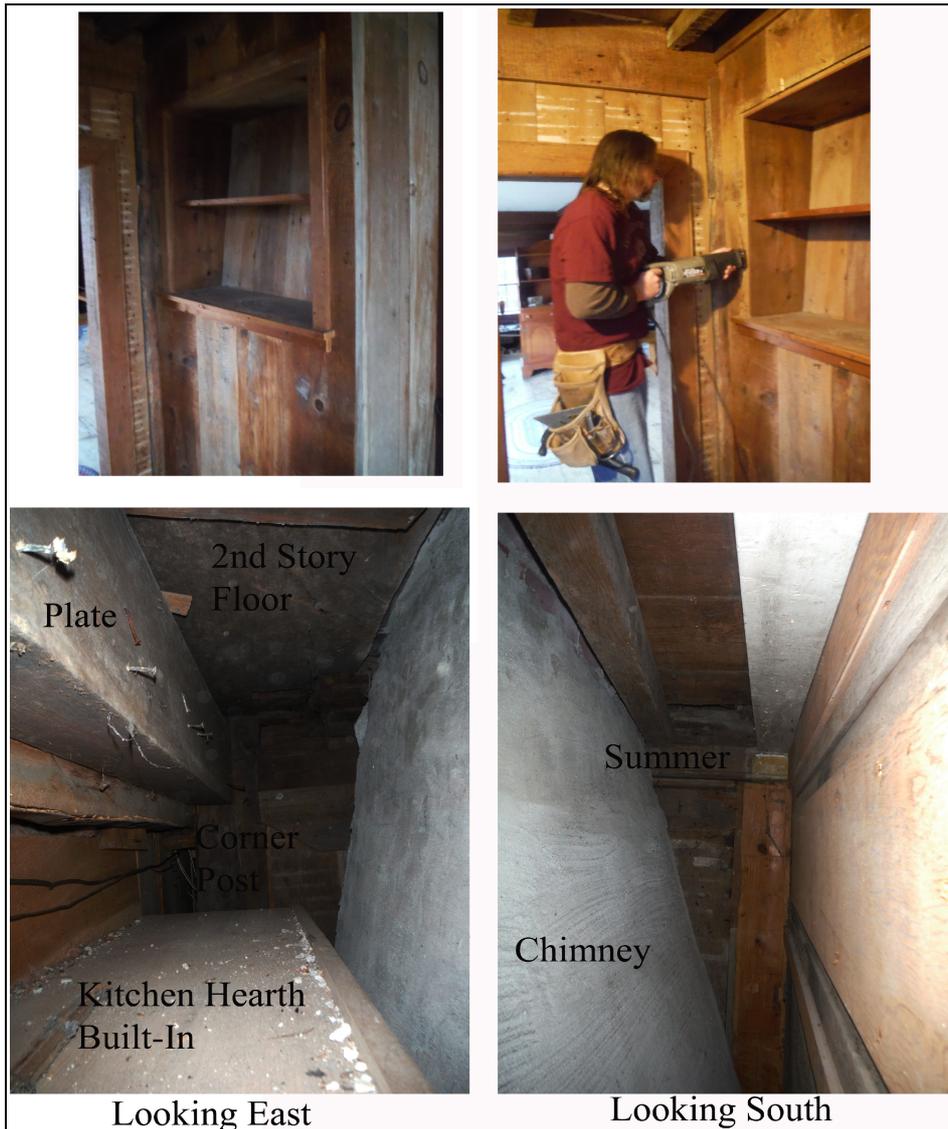


Figure 2. Investigation in the west room built-in



Figure 3. Kitchen hearth “lintle” showing how it is a reused beam and not original



Figure 4. Location of excavation unit in east closet



Figure 5. Housewright mark in east closet

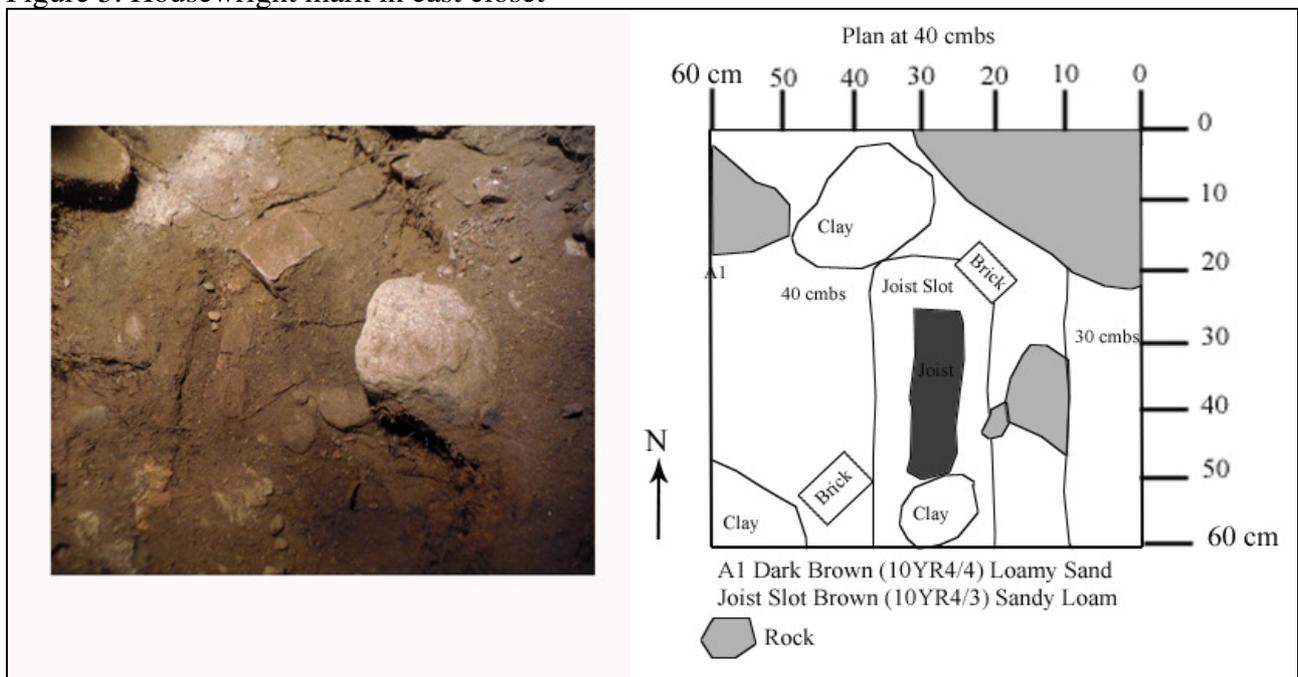


Figure 6. Plan of the excavation at 60 cmbs

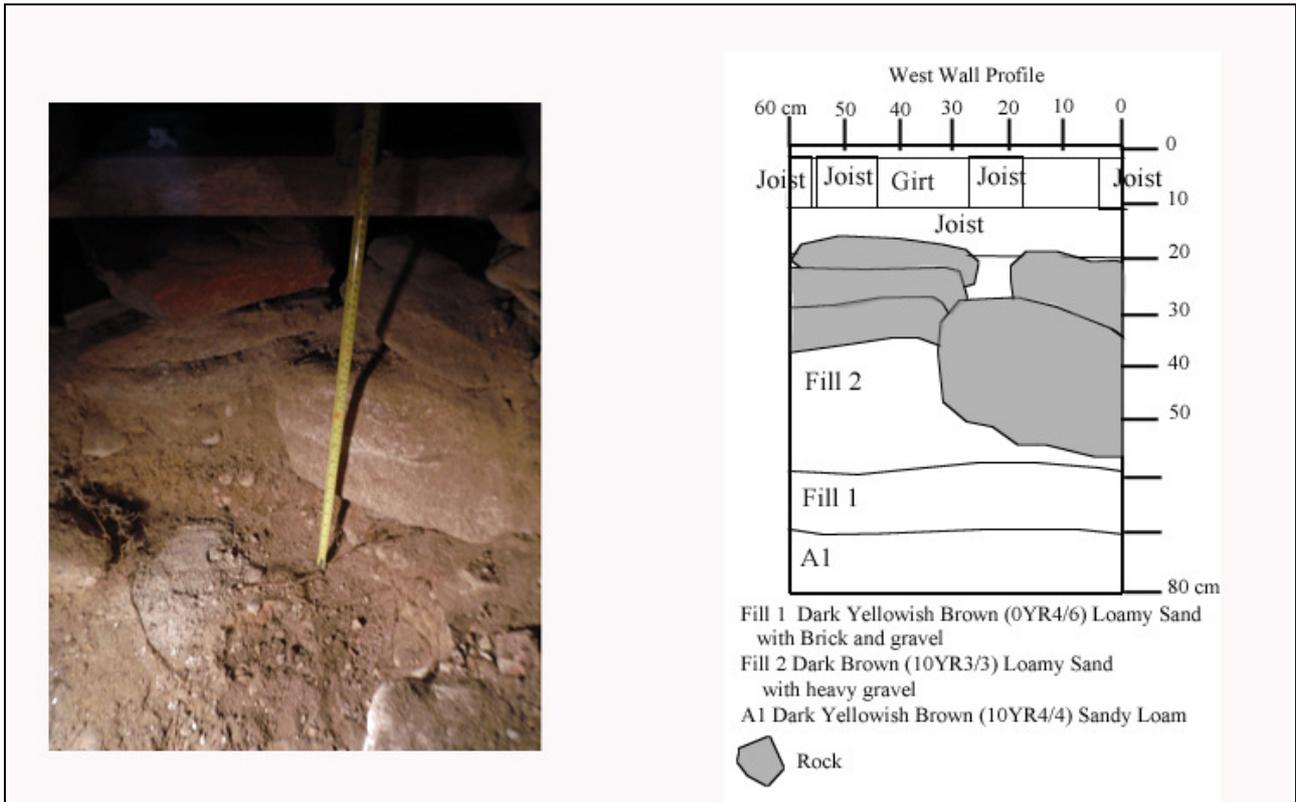


Figure 7. Profile of the excavation in the east closet



Figure 8. Lithics (Top Left to Right: Rhyolite flake, glass possible flake)



Figure 9. Wrought nails (Bottom- T-head flooring nail)



Figure 10. 17th century brick (Top: overhead view; Bottom: side view)



Figure 11. Architectural wood (Top to Bottom: Shingle, shingle, trunnel, joist fragment)



Figure 12. Faunal remains (Top: sheep humerus; Middle Left to Right: chopped and rodent gnawed cattle rib, chopped cattle lumbar vertebra fragment; Bottom: sawn cattle ribs)



Figure 13. Glass, button, and ceramics (Top Left to Right: wine bottle, molded bottle; Middle Left to Right: green edged pearlware plate, brass 2-hole button, hand painted pearlware vessel; Bottom: creamware plate with base wear)

Artifact Catalog

Unit	Level	Count	Class	Material	Identification	Portion	Color	Measurement	Notes
closet	soil on top of floor	1	Ceramic	redware	Frag	base	10YR4/6		Pan base
closet	soil on top of floor	3	Metal	Iron	Wrought nail	complete		5.5 cm lg	T-head flooring nails
	1 0-10 cm	4	Ceramic	Brick	Frag				
	1 0-10 cm	6	Ceramic	creamware	undecorated	base			plate
	1 0-10 cm	1	Ceramic	Kaolin	pipe stem			6/64" stem bore	
	1 0-10 cm	1	Ceramic	pearlware	int HP	base	dark blue		
	1 0-10 cm	3	faunal	Bone	bird lngbn	midsect			
	1 0-10 cm	2	faunal	Bone	cat cervical vert				unfused epiphysis
	1 0-10 cm	1	faunal	Bone	cat pelvis	ischium			unfused
	1 0-10 cm	1	faunal	Bone	cat rib	midsect			
	1 0-10 cm	2	faunal	Bone	cattle cervical vert	midsect			chopped and rodent gnawed
	1 0-10 cm	1	faunal	Bone	cattle Humerus	midsect			
	1 0-10 cm	2	faunal	Bone	cattle rib	midsect			
	1 surface	2	faunal	Bone	cattle rib	midsect			sawn
	1 0-10 cm	1	faunal	Bone	cattle tibia	midsect			chopped
	1 0-10 cm	1	faunal	Bone	chicken coracoid	midsect			rodent gnawed
	1 0-10 cm	2	faunal	Bone	fishcranial	Frag			
	1 0-10 cm	3	faunal	Bone	med mamm fltbn	midsect			
	1 0-10 cm	2	faunal	Bone	med mamm lngbn	midsect			
	1 0-10 cm	1	faunal	Bone	rat femur	midsect			
	1 0-10 cm	1	faunal	Bone	rat humerus	midsect			
	1 0-10 cm	1	faunal	Bone	rat mandible	proximal			
	1 0-10 cm	1	faunal	Bone	sheep cervical vert	midsect			
	1 0-10 cm	1	faunal	Bone	sheep humerus	distal			fused, chopped
	1 0-10 cm	1	faunal	Bone	swine cervical vert	midsect			chopped
	1 0-10 cm	1	faunal	Bone	swine PM				unworn
	1 0-10 cm	2	faunal	shell	soft shell clam	umbo			
	1 0-10 cm	2	faunal	shell	soft shell clam	chondrophore			
	1 0-10 cm	1	floral	charcoal	Frag				
	1 0-10 cm	1	floral	chestnut	Frag				
	1 0-10 cm	1	floral	peach pit	Half				
	1 0-10 cm	2	floral	seed	pumpkin	complete			
	1 0-10 cm	2	floral	wood	bark	Frag			
	1 0-10 cm	16	floral	wood	scraps				
	1 0-10 cm	1	floral	wood	shingle	complete		32 cm long 11 cm wide	no paint no nails
	1 0-10 cm	1	floral	wood	shingle	complete		40 cm lg 9 cm wd	circular saw marks
								nail at 17 cm and 37 cm	on back, no paint
	1 0-10 cm	1	floral	wood	shingle	Frag			no paint no nails
	1 0-10 cm	1	floral	wood	trunnel?	Frag		2 cm dia	
	1 0-10 cm	3	Glass	curved	hand blown	hurric lamp	Clear		
	1 0-10 cm	1	Glass	curved	hand blown bottle	body	drk olv gn		
	1 0-10 cm	6	Glass	Flat	Window	body	light aqua		
	1 0-10 cm	1	Glass?	Curved?	flake?	complete	Clear	60 dg pa 1.7 cm lg	

								1.5 cm wd	
1	0-10 cm	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	1.5 cm lg	
1	0-10 cm	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	1.5 cm lg	
1	0-10 cm	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	2.6 cm lg	
1	0-10 cm	1	Metal	brass	button	complete		1.6 cm dia	2 hole
1	0-10 cm	1	Metal	Iron	Wrought nail	Shank			
1	0-10 cm	2	Metal	Iron	Wrought nail	hd/ shnks			
1	0-10 cm	1	Metal	Iron	Machine cut nails	hd/ shnk			
1	0-10 cm	1	Metal	Iron	Machine cut nails	hd/ shnk			
1	0-10 cm	7	Mortar	sandy	Frag				
1	0-10 cm	2	slag	slag	Frag				
1	10-20 cm	1	Ceramic	Brick	Frag	edge		5 cm high	
1	10-20 cm	1	Ceramic	Brick	Frag				
1	10-20 cm	2	Ceramic	creamware	undecorated	bs/ bdy			plate
1	10-20 cm SE corner	1	Ceramic	creamware	undecorated	base			plate
1	10-20 cm SE corner	1	Ceramic	Kaolin	pipe stem			5/64" stem bore	
1	10-20 cm	1	Ceramic	pearlware	green edged	rm/ bdy			plate
1	10-20 cm	2	faunal	Bone	cat metacarpals				
1	10-20 cm	1	faunal	Bone	cat thorasic vert				unfused epiphysis
1	10-20 cm	1	faunal	Bone	cattle lumbar vert	spine			canine chewed, chopped
1	10-20 cm	1	faunal	Bone	cattle rib	midsect			rodent gnawed
1	10-20 cm	2	faunal	Bone	chicken cervical vert				
1	10-20 cm	1	faunal	Bone	chicken radius	midsect			
1	10-20 cm	4	faunal	Bone	med mamm lngbn				
1	10-20 cm	1	faunal	shell	oyster	half			
1	10-20 cm	1	faunal	shell	soft shell clam	body			
1	10-20 cm	2	floral	charcoal	Frag				
1	10-20 cm	1	floral	seed	pumpkin	complete			
1	10-20 cm SE corner	1	Glass	curved	hand blown bottle	body	drk olv gn	14 cm body dia	
1	10-20 cm	1	Glass	curved	hand blown wine bottle	body	drk olv gn	14 cm body dia	
1	10-20 cm	1	Glass	curved	mold blown	body	Clear		
1	10-20 cm	1	Lithic	coal	Frag				
1	10-20 cm	1	Lithic	Quartz	Flake Frag		Clear white	.8 cm wd	
1	10-20 cm	1	Lithic	Quartz	Flake Frag		Clear white	1.1 cm wd	
1	10-20 cm	1	Lithic	Quartz	Flake Frag		Clear white	.8 cm wd	
1	10-20 cm	1	Metal	Iron	Wrought nail	hd/ shnk			
1	10-20 cm	3	Metal	Iron	Wrought nail	shanks			
1	10-20 cm	1	Metal	Iron	Wrought nail	complete		7.5 cm long	
1	10-20 cm se corner	1	Mortar	clay	Frag				bag sample clay and ash
1	20-40 cm	1	Ceramic	Brick	Frag	quarter		10.2 cm wd 4.8 cm high	
1	20-40 cm	1	Ceramic	Brick	Frag	Frag			
1	20-40 cm	1	Ceramic	Brick	Frag	half		10.6 cm wd 5 cm high	
1	20-40 cm	1	Ceramic	Brick	Frag	half		5.2 cm high	
1	20-40 cm	1	Ceramic	Kaolin	pipe bowl	Frag			

1	20-40 cm	1	faunal	Bone	swine humerus	midsect			
1	20-40 cm	2	floral	charcoal	Frag				
1	20-40 cm	1	Lithic	Quartz	Core	Frag	Clear white	5.2 cm lg	
1	20-40 cm	1	Lithic	Quartz	Flake Frag	midsect	Clear white	.8 cm wd	
1	20-40 cm	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	2.5 cm lg	
1	20-40 cm	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	2 cm lg	
1	20-40 cm	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	1.5 cm lg	
1	20-40 cm	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	2.8 cm lg	
1	20-40 cm	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	1.7 cm lg	
1	20-40 cm	1	Lithic	rhyolite	flake	complete	gray	70 dg pa 2.5 cm lg	
								3 cm wd	
1	20-40 cm	1	Metal	Iron	Wrought nail	hd/ shnk			
1	60 cm w1/2	1	Ceramic	Brick	Frag	half		10.5 cm wd 5.5 cm high	17 th century style
1	40-60 cm e. wall	1	Ceramic	Brick	Frag	edge		5.5 cm high	
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	faunal	Bone	calc med mamm fltbn				
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	faunal	Bone	cattle rib				calcified sternal rib
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	faunal	Bone	cattle rib	midsect			chopped
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	faunal	Bone	sheep rib	midsect			
1	40-60 cm E1/2	3	faunal	Bone	swine caudal vert				fused epiphysis
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	faunal	Bone	swine femur	midsect			chopped
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	faunal	Bone	swine phalange				unfused epiphysis
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	faunal	shell	quahog	hinge			
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	floral	wood	oak joist			5 x 5 cm	
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	Lithic	Quartz	Flake Frag	midsect	Clear white	1 cm wd	
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	Lithic	Quartz	Flake Frag	midsect	Clear white	2.1 cm wd	
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	3.2 cm lg	
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	1.7 cm lg	
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	2.4 cm lg	
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	1.7 cm lg	
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	1.5 cm lg	
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	1.1 cm lg	
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	2.2 cm lg	
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	Lithic	Quartz	Shatter	Frag	Clear white	3.3 cm lg	
1	40-60 cm E1/2	1	Mortar	clay	Frag				lump